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BOON-SERVICES ON THE ESTATES OF RAMSEY  
ABBEY

BOON-SERVICES form so peculiar and interesting a part of the prædial life of the English villenage that a detailed examination of such services upon the more important English manors will, it seems probable, help to explain some of the social problems now troubling students of economic history. Since facts are at present more needed than conclusions, it is the object of this paper to gather together the information furnished by the printed records of the abbey of Ramsey, information to be considered fairly representative of the manorial life of east central England.

The abbey of Ramsey, founded in the time of King Eadgar, and continuing down to the general dissolution of the monasteries, was one of a group of important religious houses in eastern England, of which the more famous were Ely, Thorney, Peterborough, Crowland and, more distant, Bury St. Edmund's. The historian<sup>1</sup> of the abbey, writing shortly after the Conquest, describes the pleasant situation of the monastery in the fen country of eastern Huntingdon, and the rapid increase of the lands under its hand. By the thirteenth century the abbey's estates in Huntingdon and Cambridge, in Norfolk, Suffolk, Hertford, Bedford, Northampton and Lincoln included in all some fifty or sixty manors.<sup>2</sup>

The chartulary<sup>3</sup> of the abbey, the third volume of which appeared in 1893, contains valuable extents or customaries—inquisi-

<sup>1</sup> Gale, *Hist. Script. XV.*, p. 385.

<sup>2</sup> The most important estates were distributed as follows: in Huntingdon, 24; in Cambridge, 11; in Norfolk, 8; in Suffolk, 1; in Hertford, 1; in Bedford, 2; in Northampton, 6; in Lincoln, 2.

<sup>3</sup> *Cartularium Monasterii de Rameseia*, edited without introduction by W. H. Hart and P. A. Lyons, published in the *Rolls Series*, Vol. I. 1884; Vol. II. 1886; Vol. III. 1893.

tions into the services and customs of the tenantry—the most complete dating from the second half of the thirteenth century. Since these customaries deal with manorial estates in eight shires, scattered thus over a considerable extent of territory, the evidence furnished by them becomes of more than merely local interest. An examination of their contents makes it clear that although in its essential characteristics life on a Ramsey manor did not differ from life on a manor of the same period elsewhere, yet in matters of detail there were sometimes interesting variations. It is hoped, therefore, that a study of the boon-services, the descriptions of which are especially detailed, may be of value.

It is well known that the great burden of the labor of an estate fell on the *virgatarii*, or villeins proper. This was due to the fact that the services of the wealthier tenants—the *libere feudati* and *censuarii*—had been largely commuted, and that the services of the minor tenants—*cotarii* and *croftmanni*—were small in amount. It is, therefore, to be expected that the larger part of the customaries should be taken up with descriptions of the villeins' obligations. Beside certain small payments in money and kind, these obligations were of prædial labor and consisted of week-work and boon-services.

Briefly stated, the week-work was as follows: every villein worked on the lord's demesne, or performed some services connected with the demesne, on at least two, usually three or four days weekly throughout the year. One of these days, usually Friday, was devoted to ploughing. In mid-winter and sometimes during the weeding, haying and harvest seasons other work was substituted on the ploughing days. On feast days all work was omitted, but another day was usually required to pay for the day thus lost. Beside ploughing, a villein's work consisted of harrowing and threshing in the proper seasons, of carting, of gathering thorns and rods in the woods and marshes for enclosures, of digging ditches, and sometimes of washing and shearing the sheep and guarding the sheep-fold. Toward the end of May and beginning of June fell the weeding of the corn, later in June the haying. The pressure of work being heavy at these periods, extra days in the week were often required by the lord; again during harvest, the busiest season of the year, the week-work in most cases was largely increased.

Where the week-work alone was not sufficient to cultivate the demesne it was supplemented with the boon-works or *prccariæ*. References to boon-services occur in almost all the Ramsey extents of the thirteenth century. In their essential characteristics such

services were alike on the different manors. In all cases the most important boons were of two kinds, those required at certain periods in the year to complete the ploughing of the demesne, and those required at harvest time to reap and gather in the crops. The descriptions of the harvest-boons are full and exact. The boon-ploughings, on the other hand, are referred to as a rule in a very cursory manner, so that it is difficult to define them with certainty. An examination of the existing material gives the following results :

*Boon-ploughings (precaria carucarum).* The boon-ploughings are mentioned in the customaries not as merely incidental services to occur only if the week-work chance to be insufficient, but as necessary and fixed aids to the ploughing of the demesne. It is usually stated that the demesne of the abbot requires for its cultivation its own ploughs, the customary ploughing of the villata (*i. e.*, the weekly ploughing) and boon-ploughings.<sup>1</sup> The number of such boons varied on different manors, being left in some cases to the will of the lord.<sup>2</sup> As a rule, however, the tenant ploughed a certain number of acres or rods, or it may be during a certain number of days, three times a year. The first of these special ploughings fell in early winter, *ab hybernagium* or *in hyemale*; the second in early spring, *ad tramesiam*, and the third in summer, *ad warrectum*.<sup>3</sup> In one instance the periods of the ploughings are more accurately defined; a villein was to plough about the time of the feast of Saint Martin (November 11), about mid-Lent and about the time of the feast of Saint John Baptist (June 24 or perhaps August 29). The ploughings were called lovebones.<sup>4</sup> On the manor of Aylington the periods of the ploughing are a little different. Both the *Hundred Rolls* and the *Chartulary* mention on this estate a boon-ploughing about Christmas time as well as the one in November.<sup>5</sup> The winter ploughing about Martinmas took place at

<sup>1</sup> I. 331: "Dominicum Abbatis de Broughtone . . . cum consuetudinibus villæ, et duabus precariis carucarum vel tribus, possunt quatuor caruæ sufficienter lucrari." For similar statements see I. 282, 304, 353, etc.

<sup>2</sup> I. 324: "Precariam carucarum faciet, quotiens sibi præcipiatur, ad diem domini in septimana, ad cibum domini."

<sup>3</sup> I. 441: "Arabit ter per annum, . . . scilicet in hyeme, Quadragesima et æstate in quolibet tempore seminis." II. 11: "Arat tres lovebones et unam ad hybernagium, aliam ad tramesium, tertiam ad warrectum."

<sup>4</sup> I. 50: "et debet tres aruras per annum, videlicet, circa festum Sancti Martini, et circa mediam Quadragesimam, et circa festum Sancti Johannis Baptistæ, et vocantur lovebones."

<sup>5</sup> I. 488: "Tota villata . . . facient precarias cum caruca circa festum Sancti Michaelis ad cibum domini. Et si dominus opus habuerit, aliam precariam contra Natale." *Rot. Hund.*, II. 657: "Veniet ad tres precarias carucarum si dominus voluerit, semel post festum Sancti Michaelis, secundum qua Natale, tertio post Pascham ad cibum domini."

the sowing of wheat (*frumentum*), the ploughing *ad tramesiam* in the spring, at the sowing of barley and oats; the ploughing *ad warrectum* may have been a stirring of the field ploughed in the spring and left fallow.<sup>1</sup> If the three-field system prevailed, there would be, then, one field sown in early winter with wheat to be reaped in the fall, a second field sown in the spring with barley and oats to be reaped in the fall, and a third field lying in fallow.

There seems to have been a widespread custom on the manorial estates that the tenant sow with his own seed whatever he ploughed *ad hybernagium*. At the Lent-ploughing, on the other hand, he sowed with the lord's seed.<sup>2</sup> The seed furnished by the tenant himself was called *benesed*,<sup>3</sup> and in one case would seem to have been paid for by a sheaf of corn—as much as could be tied with one strand—given him the next harvest from the land he had ploughed and sown the preceding fall.<sup>4</sup>

It is difficult to determine to what extent the lord at the boon-ploughings observed the custom, universal at the harvest-boons, of providing food for the workers. Most of the customaries, in their scant descriptions of boon-ploughings, pass over the matter in silence. In the few cases where it is mentioned the lord usually provided the food.<sup>5</sup>

Very little more can be gathered from the customaries concerning the boon-ploughings. Of the second kind of boon-services, the harvest-boons, however, the descriptions are detailed and full.

<sup>1</sup> I. 296: . . . "et arabit etiam per annum, scilicet ad semen frumenti unam acram, ad semen hordei unam acram, et tempore warrecti unam acram." See also I. 343, 346.

<sup>2</sup> I. 384: . . . Arabit unam rodam hybernagium et seminabit frumento proprio; arabit etiam ad tramesiam unam rodam ad avenam, et seminabit illam avena domini." See also III. 276: "Et in hieme . . . arat unam rodam, et seminat illam cum semine suo: et in Quadragesima similiter, unam rodam sine semine."

<sup>3</sup> I. 461: "In tempore vero hyemali de consuetudine arabit unam rodam, et proprio semine, quod dicitur benesed, seminabit."

<sup>4</sup> I. 399: "Ad hybernagium seminabunt duo terram tenentes unam rodam de frumento proprio, et habebunt singuli eorum in autumnno sequenti unam garbam de eodem frumento, quantum poterit ligare uno ligamine, pro suo semine."

<sup>5</sup> For exceptions see I. 441: "Arahit ter per annum . . . in hyeme, Quadragesima, et æstate . . . ad cibum proprium." I. 475: "Quælibet caruca arabit ad cibum proprium unum sellionem . . . ad hybernagium . . . et vocabitur beneerthe."

In a few cases the amount and kind of food furnished by the lord is specified. In Brancester, for instance (I. 415): "ad hybernagium . . . habebit quælibet caruca pro singulis aruris tres panes debitæ quantitatis et decem allecia. Ad tramesiam . . . sicut ad hybernagium." In Houghton (I. 366) the villeins ploughed "ad cibum domini, et si eos non pascant, non arabunt." The tenants received, in this case, three farthings for each day's ploughing *ad tramesiam* and *ad warrectum*. In Ringsted a villein ploughing after All Saints received pasture in the croft until the middle of the following March. I. 406: "Faciet unam aruram una die post festum Omnium Sanctorum, cum quot capitibus habet in caruca, et pro illa habebit pasturam in crofta, ita tamen quod custodiat averia sua a damno domini usque ad medietatem Martii." This would seem to correspond to the *graserth* ploughings of other chartularies.

*Harvest-Boons (precariae autumni).* The harvest began about the first of August and lasted on into September. During this time all the crops on the demesne were to be cut, stacked, carried to the manor-house and stored in the grange. To meet the pressure of work as far as might be, it was the custom on many manors largely to increase the week-work. Where during the rest of the year the villein had worked perhaps three days in the week, during the harvesting he worked five days or, it may be, every day but Sunday<sup>1</sup>. Not only was the number of his days increased, but also the number of men he furnished to work on those days. If during the rest of the year he had worked alone or furnished a man to work in his place, during harvest he furnished two or more men. On one manor he worked every day in the week with one man, or every other day with two men.<sup>2</sup> In many cases reaping was substituted for his weekly ploughing. In the face of this large amount of work for the lord it is difficult to see how a villein's own harvesting was accomplished. References to such harvesting are rare; such as there are, however, go to show that there were a number of working men in every household not all of whom would be required by the lord. On the manor of Hemingford<sup>3</sup> all the men of the villa were required to aid the *firmarius* with his harvest, but not until they had finished their own reaping. Again on the same manor a tenant went to the *precariae* with all that reaped on his own land.

A simple increase in the week-work, however, was not sufficient for the reaping. As in the case of the ploughing, so also in the harvesting the lord depended largely on special services. In autumn the days on which such services were rendered were called *bene-*, or *boon-days*. The number of these days, although occasionally left to the will and discretion of the lord, was usually fixed for every manor. In the large number of cases three such days, or two and a third if necessary, were appointed; sometimes as many as four might be required.<sup>4</sup> The time of the occurrence of such services would depend upon the ripeness of the grain and the state of the weather. An advantage of boon-services over week-work was that the days for boon-services were not irrevocably fixed, but could be appointed when it seemed best to the lord. In one customary the

<sup>1</sup> See, for instance, on the manor of S. Ives, I. 288; Warboys, I. 310; Broughton, I. 335; Upwood, I. 345; Barton, I. 475.

<sup>2</sup> I. 299: " . . . a Gula Augusti, quolibet altero die hebdomadæ, quam[diu] messis durabit, inveniet duos homines, vel quolibet altero die septimo pro voluntate domini inveniet unum hominem, excepto Sabbato."

<sup>3</sup> III. 311: "Et si homines villæ citius compleverint messionem suam quam firmarius, omnes venient et adjuvabunt eum cotidie."

<sup>4</sup> I. 56: " . . . debet quatuor precarias in autumnno, vel plus ad voluntatem domini." See also I. 311, 377.

times at which they would best occur are stated.<sup>1</sup> The first was to fall, if possible, in the third week of harvest, that is, usually, the third week in August; the second in the fourth week; and the third in the fifth week. Of these the first, or "great *precaria*," was the most important. The villein furnished more men to it than to the others,<sup>2</sup> and in many cases it was the only *precaria* attended by the wealthier tenants, the *censuarii*. On the manor of Houghton all in the vill that could work except the free went to the first *precaria*, to the second and third all that held lands, with all the efficient members of their families except their wives.<sup>3</sup>

Since the greater part of the labor of the harvest-boons fell on the villein, the customaries describe in detail his duties on these occasions. He went to the fields himself with all his family except his wife or some one who stayed at home to guard the house. If he were ill he might stay at home and his wife with him to tend him, or it might be that she went to the fields in his place.<sup>4</sup> In one case he stayed at home himself if he furnished four men to work.<sup>5</sup>

That the lord furnished food to the workers at the harvest *precariæ* has been already stated. In many of the extents there are full descriptions of the food thus received by the villeins, its kind and the quantity prescribed. It was distributed according to a set system, the kind of food varying regularly on different boon-days. As a rule, but one meal a day was provided, "nonemetes," but there are occasional references to food received at vespers also.<sup>6</sup> At the first *precaria* bread, cheese, smoked, fresh or salted meat, ale and *potagium*, a kind of drink made principally of beans and peas, were distributed to the workers; at the second, bread, cheese and fish, usually herring. On several manors (Hemmingford, Stukeley and Barton) meat was received at the second *precaria* as well as at the first. On

<sup>1</sup> I. 463: "In tertia septimana . . . in qua, si commode possit fieri, erit magna precaria messis. In quarta hebdomada . . . erit secunda precaria . . . in quinta septimana . . . in qua, si necesse fuerit, poterit esse una precaria."

<sup>2</sup> I. 447: . . . "veniet ad magnam precariam cum tota familia, quæ potest operari. Ad secundum inveniet duos homines. Ad tertiam unum hominem."

<sup>3</sup> I. 367: "Præterea, si firmarius facere voluerit tres precarias in autumno, ad primam illarum venient quotquot sunt in villa, qui operari poterunt, præter liberos (tenentes?), ad illam; etiam et ad duas alias veniet quilibet terram tenens, cum tota familia quæ operari potest, præter uxorem."

<sup>4</sup> I. 336: "Ad omnes etiam precarias autumnus veniet ipse vel uxor ejus, cum tot operariis quot habet; et si minus quam tres operarios habeat, alter eorum operabitur, et si plures, deferet virgam ultra suos operarios et non uxor; et si ipse infirmetur, uxor ejus domi remanebit ad ipsum custodiendum; et nihilominus omnes operarios mittet ad precariam."

<sup>5</sup> I. 300:—"Et sciendum, quod quotiens invenit quatuor homines, bene licet ei domui remanere, si voluerit."

<sup>6</sup> I. 405: "Ad vesperam habebit duos billinges et caseum, vel duo allecia."

I. 414: "habebunt singuli ad vesperam duos panes, et duo allecia, vel caseum."

the third boon-day the same food was distributed as on the first, and on the fourth, if there were a fourth, the same as on the second.<sup>1</sup> The food was graduated according to this system on almost all the manors, the most striking exception being at Barnwell, in Norfolk, where at the first *precaria*, or "bedryp" as it was called there, bread, fish and water were received, at the second bread, meat and ale.<sup>2</sup>

*Extra Boon-Services.* The food provided at the harvest *precaria* would seem in origin to represent the thanks of the lord for the special services performed by the tenants at his request. By the thirteenth century, however, the giving of food had become an obligation to which the lord was as much bound as were the tenants to the rendering of boon-services. This transformation of a voluntary gift into an obligation gave rise to a new group of boon-services by means of which, it would seem, the lord endeavored to recompense himself for the food he gave to the tenants. In the Ramsey extents of the thirteenth century there is frequent reference to extra days of service demanded as a return for the food given at the regular harvest *precaria*. There is no evidence to show that they were demanded after the boon-ploughings, perhaps because the food received at those times was a less considerable factor and bore less heavily as an obligation upon the lord. These extra services are called in most of the extents *lovebones*. The term lovebone is not limited to extra services of this kind, but is applied to any service, outside the regular work, performed at the need and demand of the lord. It is worthy of note, however, that, although regularly given to the boon-ploughings, it is never used for the harvest *precaria*. The lovebone after the harvest *precaria* fell, as a rule, on the morrow of the first boon-day, but occasionally it was rendered at the worker's own pleasure.<sup>3</sup> The service was avowedly to pay for the food received at the *precaria*. On such occasions the villein providing his own food worked in person or furnished a man to work to pay for the food received from the lord on the preceding day.<sup>4</sup> In St. Ives if

<sup>1</sup> I. 300: "Veniet etiam ad primam precariam in autumnno cum quatuor hominibus, et habebunt panem, servisiā, potagium, carnem et caseum; et duo homines habebunt tres panes ita quod quantitas panis unius duobus ad prandium sufficiat; et panis erit de frumento et siligine, ita quod major pars sit frumentum. Veniet autem ad secundam precariam, sicuti ad primam, quæ erit ad panem, potagium, aquam, allecia et caseum; . . . Ad tertiam autem precariam veniet sicuti ad primam, si dominus voluerit; ad quam habebunt in omnibus sicut ad primam." See also I. 337, 324.

<sup>2</sup> I. 49: . . . "primum bederipe cum pane, allece et aqua; et alium bene faciet sine cibo, et alium bederipe, si placet domino; sed secundum bederipe cum pane, carne et cervisia; et inveniet sibi et familie suæ unum ciphum ad potandum dum comedit, et feret secum domui suæ plenum ciphum suum de cervisia, quamvis sit de una lagena . . ."

<sup>3</sup> I. 399: . . . "et ad diem proprium mittet quilibet unum hominem ad metendum, ad reddendum cibum precariæ."

<sup>4</sup> I. 300: "Et inveniet unum hominem in crastinum ad reddendum cibum diei præcedentis." See also I. 289, 311, 368, 395, 395.



the *precariæ* fell before the first of August, the villein worked on the morrow with one man; if after the first of August, he worked with two men;<sup>1</sup> in most cases, however, only one man had to be provided. All the villata, except in most cases the *libere feudati*, were liable to such lovebones. Thus in Barton each man that had a house opening on the street furnished a worker to the lovebone whether he held by money rent or by labor.<sup>2</sup> *Censuarii* often worked after the first *precariæ* only, whereas in many cases the villein worked after all.<sup>3</sup> Reaping<sup>4</sup> was the usual service performed at a lovebone of this kind; occasionally a "*lovefother*," or carrying service was rendered instead of, or as well as, the reaping. On the manor of Hemingford such carrying service was clearly rendered in return for meat and ale received at the *precariæ*.<sup>5</sup>

These extra boon-services would seem, then, to witness to the increase and hardening of services in the thirteenth century. The boon-works first asked for, and then demanded, carried with them an obligation of food which in turn became burdensome to the lord. The original voluntary character of this obligation having been lost sight of, the lord apparently compensated himself for the food given by the imposition of new services, thus increasing the labors of the tenantry. This explanation would account for the fact that in Ramsey extents of a date earlier than the thirteenth century such harvest lovebones do not occur.

Although the boon-services thus far mentioned were the most extensive, there were others of minor importance and more or less sporadic occurrence. In the weeding and haying seasons, for instance, the villein performed sometimes slight boon-services instead of increasing his week-work, or it may be, in addition to such increase. For the lovebone at haying (*lovebone de falcatione*) the

<sup>1</sup>I. 289: "Et si ista precaria, ob maturitatem temporis, capiatur ante Gulam Augusti, quod aliquando accidit, in crastino illius precariæ operabitur cum uno homine in recompensatione prandii precariæ præcedentis, sine cibo; et si post Gulam Augusti eadem capiatur precaria, inveniet duos homines operantes eodem modo quo prius."

<sup>2</sup>I. 488: "Item quælibet domus, habens ostium apertum versus vicum, tam de malmannis quam de cotmannis et operariis, inveniet unum hominem ad lovebone, sine cibo domini." Professor Vinogradoff, *Villainage in Eng.*, p. 284, makes this passage refer to the regular harvest *precariæ*. This seems improbable, however, for, as has been said, the term lovebone is never used for the harvest boon-days, and in no instance does a reaper work on a regular boon without receiving food from the lord.

<sup>3</sup>See I. 289, where the villein works one day after each of three *precariæ*.

<sup>4</sup>The *thancalfaker*, the reaping of the half acre, mentioned by Professor Vinogradoff, *Villainage in Eng.*, p. 285, would seem to belong to such lovebone services.

<sup>5</sup>I. 385-6: "Veniet ad primam precariam . . . Inveniet ad diem proprium unum hominem ad metendum pro cibo precariæ; Carriabit etiam ad diem proprium unam carrectatam bladi, quæ vocatur lovefother. Si dominus necesse habuerit facere secundam precariam, veniet ad illam . . . Et si habuerit carnem et cervisiam sicut ad primum, inveniet unum hominem, et faciet lovefother, sicut ad primam."

villein usually received some compensation, in most cases twelve pence from the Abbot's purse for "sythale" or "scotale," and as much grass as he could lift on his scythe without bending the scythe to the ground or breaking it.<sup>1</sup> The customaries refer to boons or lovebones of harvesting, of carrying rods, threshing and planting beans.<sup>2</sup> Special ploughings are called "benerth"<sup>3</sup> or "wudobene,"<sup>4</sup> special reapings "beneryp."<sup>5</sup> Such services are called indifferently boon- or ben-services.

The boon-services, although falling most heavily on the villeins, were by no means confined to them. Cottars and croftmen also attended the *precariæ*, going usually either alone or with one worker. *Censuarii*, too, all the rest of whose labor services had been commuted, had still to appear at the boons, in many cases at both the ploughing and the harvest boons. Some difference was made, however, between the *censuarius* and the ordinary villein. The villein at the harvest boons worked in the fields with his own hands, whereas the *censuarius* "bore a rod over the workers to admonish them that they should work well."<sup>6</sup> Usually too, the *censuarius* dined in the hall at the table of the *firmarius*, but the villein dined in the field with the other workmen.<sup>7</sup> A further distinction is sometimes found in cases, already mentioned, where the *censuarius* attended only the first *precaria*. Thus attendance at the boon-services was the last prædial labor of the *censuarius* to be commuted. Freeholders, the main characteristic of whose tenure was freedom from prædial obligation, did not of course as a rule appear. An occasional instance of their attendance occurs, however. On the manor of Upwood the holder of a free hide of the abbey, beside the usual services of a free-

<sup>1</sup> Most extents mention such customs at haying. See, for instance, I. 298, 307, 324, 460; II. 39; III. 65.

<sup>2</sup> III. 254: "Et herciat ad luebone duobus diebus, et portat virgas apud Sanctum Yvonem ad luebone una die; et purgat bladum una die ad luebone," etc.

<sup>3</sup> I. 475: "Quælibet caruca arabit ad cibum proprium unum sellionem. Et vocabitur beneerthe."

<sup>4</sup> I. 310: "In secunda septimana post festum Sancti Michaelis arabit dimidiam acram, quæ appellatur Wodebene." I. 487: "Qualibet virgata operaria arabit dimidiam acram in hyeme quod dicitur beene. Et in æstate aliam dimidiam acram, quod dicitur wudobeene."

<sup>5</sup> I. 358: "Metet etiam duas rodas frumenti, quod dicitur beneryp, ligabit, et domi carriabit, sine cibo domini."

<sup>6</sup> I. 308: "... veniet ad omnes precarias autumnii, deferens virgam super operarios, eodem die in curia comesturus." I. 354: "Et veniet in propria persona, cum duobus hominibus suis operantibus, ad primam precariam in autumnio; et erit ultra operantes, ad monendum eos ut bene operentur." See also I. 336, 405; II. 47, etc.

<sup>7</sup> I. 368: "Ad singulas etiam istarum precariarum veniet tam Tancredus, quam heres Warini Blundi, cum tota familia sua, quæ operari potest, præter uxores, et ipsi deferent virgas suas super operarios. Familiae vero eorum operabuntur sicut et alii. Ipsi etiam comedent in aula cum firmario, familiae vero eorum cum operariis aliis." Cf. I. 492.

holder, ploughed and was present himself or sent his bailiff or reeve to the first harvest *precariæ* to see that his tenants worked well.<sup>1</sup>

That the *precariæ* should be the last rural service to be commuted is not surprising. Whereas, on account of its cumbersome nature, it was an advantage to both lord and tenant that the week-work be commuted, the lord would be reluctant to surrender services so important and convenient as the boons. The week-work could occur on stated days only; the boon-services on the other hand, within certain limits, could be demanded at the lord's discretion, and hence could be regulated by the weather and the condition of the crops. As a rule, the ploughing-boons seem to have been commuted before the harvest *precariæ*, for in many cases the tenant rendered only the harvest-boons.<sup>2</sup> A few instances occur, however, of attendances at the boon-ploughings where the harvest-boons are not mentioned.<sup>3</sup>

In connection with the question of commutation it is interesting to compare with the thirteenth century extents others of an earlier period also contained in the chartulary. These earlier customaries date from before the death of Henry I. and describe the conditions in the reign of that king. Though shorter and less detailed than the later customaries, they cover in the main the same manors and relate with considerable accuracy the services of the tenants. By an examination of the two sets of extents it is therefore possible to compare both the week-work and the *precariæ* on the same manor at an interval of about a hundred years. Mr. Seebohm, believing that the tenants on a manorial estate were originally serfs and that the lord could at one time demand from them unlimited labor, considers *precariæ* the "necessary corollary to the limitation of week-work." For, according to his theory, as the number of days on which a tenant worked for his lord became fixed by custom, the lord demanded special services to fill up the gap left by the decreasing week-work. The week-work and *precariæ* would thus stand to one another in inverse ratio, the one decreasing as the other increased. Would it not be expected, then, that in two series of extents for so large a number of manors as is described in the Ramsey chartulary there would appear a marked tendency towards decreasing week-work? Such, however, is not the case; the tendency seems to

<sup>1</sup> I. 343: "Alexander . . . tenet unam hydram pro qua facit homagium Abbati et forinsecum servitium sicut aliæ hydæ liberæ in Abbatia . . . Duas aruras faciet . . . Et quilibet ejus tenentium inveniet unum hominem ad primam precariam autumnii, ad cibum domini; et ipse, vel ejus ballivus vel præpositus, erunt, ad illam precariam, custodes ad videndum quod bene operentur."

<sup>2</sup> I. 287, 308, 333, 492; III. 245.

<sup>3</sup> I. 334, 344.

have been rather in the opposite direction. For, notwithstanding the appearance of boon-services, the week-work not only did not decrease, but in some cases increased, and even where the number of days required in the week remained practically the same the kind and amount of service to be rendered on those days is in the later extents much more definitely stated. On the manor of Upwood, for instance, in the time of Henry I. the villein worked three days weekly from harvest to harvest, four days weekly with two men during harvest and went to no *precariæ*. In the thirteenth century, on the other hand, he worked four days weekly from harvest to haying, four days weekly during the haying season and four days weekly with two men during harvest and went also to boon-ploughings and harvest-boons.<sup>1</sup> Again, in Holywell in the time of King Henry the villein worked three days a week during the rest of the year and cut thirteen acres during harvest, attending no *precariæ*. In the thirteenth century he worked three days a week up to the haying, three whole days during the haying and a fourth day until he had cut one-half acre, and during harvest every other day with two men or every day with one man, attending also the boon-ploughings and the harvest-boons.<sup>2</sup> A comparison of the extents of other manors gives like results.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Compare III. 270 and I. 340 et seq.

<sup>2</sup> Compare III. 281 and I. 293 et seq.

<sup>3</sup> The following tabulation of the number of days of labor on a few important Ramsey manors may help to illustrate the difference in services for the two periods. The tabulation for the thirteenth century cannot be made very exact, because the extents of that period vary greatly in their division of the seasons of the working year.

Before 1135.				13th Century.			
	Week Work. Number of Days			Week Work. Number of Days			Precariæ.
	from Har- vest to Harvest.	in the Harvest Season.		from Har- vest to Haying.	in the Haying Season.	in the Harvest Season.	
Upwood . . .	3	4 with 2 men.	No Precariæ.	4	4	4 with 2 men.	In the thirteenth century the villeins on the manors selected went to all the <i>precariæ</i> .
Haliwell . .	3	Villein to cut 13 acres.		3	3 and part of a fourth.	Every other day with 2 men or every day with one man.	
Hemingford .	2	3		3	3	3	
S. Ives . . .	3	6		One week 5 next 3.		5	
Houghton . .	4	5		4	4	5	
Cranfeld . .	4	5		4	5	5	
Barton . . .	3	3		3	3	5	

NOTE.—In the earlier extents no haying season is mentioned.

Although the boon-services were greatly increased by the time of the later extents—in the time of King Henry I. such services being the exception, while in the thirteenth century they became almost universal<sup>1</sup>—nevertheless, since this increase was accompanied by no corresponding decrease in the week-work, it does not seem possible to consider one dependent upon the other. Rather, both would seem to show a decided increase in the liabilities of the villeins. Such an inference is strengthened by the fact that at the later period the autumn services were rendered still heavier by the lovebones imposed after the harvest *precaria*. Such lovebones, as has been said, are not mentioned in the extents of Henry I.'s time even when the *preces*, as the *precaria* are called, were required, and only one reference occurs in any extent before the second half of the thirteenth century.<sup>2</sup> In short, the tendency as shown in the later extents seems to have been toward a hardening and a more strict definition of all services still uncommuted, without any lessening in the amount of such services. It must be remembered, however, that although the two series of extents here considered are separated by a century, yet the earlier set does not go farther back than the reign of Henry I. The documents in the Chartulary dating from before that time throw but little light on the early social condition of the villein.

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<sup>1</sup> In the extents of the time of Henry I. harvest *preces* are mentioned on the following manors: Gravele, III. 278: "Et quamdiu messis durat, quatuor diebus operatur in hebdomada, et ad preces firmarii, cum tota familia sua, ad cibum domini veniet;" Elsworth, III. 300; Cnapwell, III. 301; Weston, III. 312; Schilingdon, III. 308; Gretton, III. 314. In Burwell, III. 309, *preces* are implied: "Et a Capite Augusti usque ad Natale Sanctæ Mariæ operabitur quator diebus; Et præter hoc metet duas acres et tunc habebit cibum suum."

The boon-ploughings do not occur by name in the earlier extents, but in some cases such ploughings seem to have existed. III. 269: "Et, si firmarius rogaverit, ter arabunt ad cibum firmarii." III. 276: "Et in hieme . . . arat unam rodam et seminat illam cum semine suo, et in Quadragesima similiter, unam rodam sine semine." See also III. 259, 278, 279, 308, 311, 312.

<sup>2</sup> In an extent of Hemingford dating from the end of the twelfth century, II. 243: "Et ipse erit ad primas preces cum omni familia sua, excepta uxore; et crastina erit ad lovebone."